THE SIDON SCARABOID S/3487

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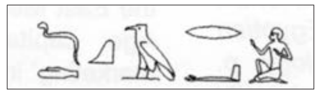
HENRI-CHARLES LOFFET

Description

The underside of this perfectly oval scaraboid is inscribed with a text written in Egyptian hieroglyphs enclosed in a narrow border and very precisely engraved. The text is evenly disposed over two vertical columns. The back of the object has been badly damaged, as though someone had tried to force it out of a part of the setting of a seal ring that held it fast [1]. The scaraboid is made of black steatite. The archaeological level in which this object was found has been dated to Middle Bronze II B (*c.* 1800-1650 BC), corresponding to the very end of the XII and the beginning of the XIII dynasties in Egypt (the first part of the Second Intermediate Period). It was found in an urban occupation level and can therefore not be related to a funerary source of any kind [2].

The Anthroponym

The anthroponym covers the entire right side of the scaraboid:



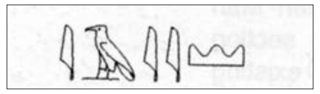
ḏd - ḳꜣ - rꜥ

In view of the context in which this object was found, it would seem judicious as well as appropriate to think in terms of a Semitic proper name.

The hieroglyphs on the scaraboid are Egyptian. Actually, the lapidary here used uniconsonantal signs (i.e. without any vowels), a writing system well known and well attested in the Egyptian Middle Kingdom. The anthroponym thus written is none other than the Semitic "Sadok"[3], completed with the Egyptian divine name "Re". It is therefore a theophoric proper name, "Sadok-Re", "Re is just" [4]. This is, however, the first known instance of this Egypto-Semitic anthroponym, and there is at present no known echo of it in the literature of Egypt or the Levant [5].

The Toponym

The toponym, inscribed on the left column, is already known from another source; it is:

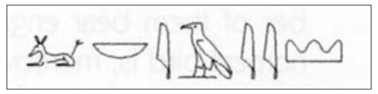


ỉꜣy

It is known from apotropaic figurine E 21, now in the *Musée Royal d'Art et d'Histoire* (within the *Palais du Cinquantenaire*) in Brussels, that this area was ruled by a "prince" [6]. In his study of Canaanite toponyms, Shmuel Ahituv [7] considers that the apotropaic figurines show that "a localization in the Beqaa is favoured by the context", since figurine E20 displays the toponym "Biq'a". This localization remains somewhat precarious, however, in view of the evidence at present available. The Sidonian scaraboid thus represents, to the best of our knowledge, the second occurrence of this toponym, which should manifestly be located in the Syro-Palestinian area, if not more precisely in the Bekaa valley, at this stage in the research. The discovery of this object at Sidon, however, adds a weighty new argument to Shmuel Ahituv's theory that both Sidon and the Bekaa valley were densely populated.

The Divinity

The name of the god worshipped in this region is also found in the left column of the scaraboid, at the top:



stẖ/bꜥl nb ỉꜣy
Seth/Ba'al, Lord of Iay

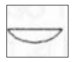
The occurence of this name is unprecedented: the area was not previously known to be under the protection of the god Seth/Ba'al [8].

The Script of the Hieroglyphic Text

Here, in the context of Lebanon, it would seem that there is only one conceivable and pertinant explanation for the occurence of this form of writing: seal engraving of the Syro-Lebanese and Syro-Palestinian region in the Middle Bronze Age. It will be seen that the hieroglyphs, treated in a manner that is to say the least curious and disconcerting at first sight, in fact represent a convention well known and well attested in this part of the world at that time.

Signs  that stand for "*ỉ* " (*yôdh*), thus drawn, are well attested in the inscriptions on cylinder seals and scarabs unearthed in the Syro-Lebanese and Syro-Palestinian region in the Middle Bronze Age [9]. However, these Syro-Lebanese or Syro-Palestinian *yôdhs*, drawn in this way, are oddly reminiscent of the hieratic of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom [10]; this proves indisputably that this form of writing travelled, was copied and was assimilated by some inhabitants of these regions. It would thus appear that the convention of representing this sign in the Syro-Lebanese writing

of the Middle Bronze Age just as it was then written in Egypt is simply a straightforward imitation on the part of the Near Eastern scribe.

The sign  that stands for "nb", in the form in which it appears here, is well attested in many Egyptianizing texts found in this region [11], although it is also encountered in texts that originate in Egypt itself [12].

The horned alephs  shown here represent the magnificent Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). This species is one of the commonest vultures in Egypt and one of the most frequently represented from the very earliest times [13]. When the bird is surprised or anxious it raises the erectile feathers on its head in defence or to intimidate. The Egyptians, in common with the inhabitants of other countries where this vulture lives, were well aware of this characteristic; in certain periods it appears in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics in more or less pronounced form [14]. The first appearance of the Egyptian Vulture hieroglyph, delineated with the feathers on its head raised, seems to be at the end of the First Intermediate Period.

But here again, it is not to the Egyptian sources that we turn, but to the sources mentioned above, whose provenance is near the Syro-Lebanese region. One has only to look into a few works that discuss the cylinder seals and scarab seals from these regions to see at once that a large number of them bear engraved images of horned birds of all sorts [15]. The horned bird is, moreover, one of the most frequently occurring motifs in the area, together with the griffin and the sphinx, which are also usually horned [16].

The sign:  *s<u>th</u>* closely resembles that on a cylinder seal disco-vered at Alalakh (a city-state of northwestern Syria, in an area now within the confines of Turkey), dated to 1800 BC at the latest [17] and now in the British Museum. The second column contains a phrase identical to that of the Sidonian scaraboid: "...Seth/Ba'al, Lord of ////k//// (?)" [18].

Discussion

First and foremost, this scaraboid provides the second known attestation of the city-state of 'Iay. It confirms the existence of this geographic entity, previously known only from the apotropaic figurine in Brussels. Ruled by a "prince", 'Iay should perhaps be located in the Bekaa valley, as Ahituv thought likely. The distance between Sidon and this valley is in fact very short and the route is very easy. The valley has been traversed at all periods in the history of the Near East by caravans and traders who came from as far as the banks of the Euphrates or merely from Damascus to sell their merchandise in the Mediterranean ports, such as that of Sidon. It is for this reason that we suggest that 'Iay should be located on the road between Damascus and Sidon, to the south of the Bekaa valley. From this scaraboid we also know that one of the divinities of 'Iay was a Sethian Baal, and that he was its "Ruler/Lord". The given name of the owner of this scaraboid seal was Sadok-Re: he was thus a Semite and not an Egyptian. Why then would he have had his seal engraved with such well executed hieroglyphs? One should not forget that the scaraboid was unearthed in an area of urban occupation and not in a cemetary. The following hypothesis was therefore formulated: *Sadok-Re* was one of the "*Princes*" of the city state of 'Iay [19], a city state some of whose trade was with Egyptians who came to the Levantine coast to obtain a variety of products for which there was a market in Egypt [20]. That seals engraved with hieroglyphs were used by Semitic notables who exerted authority and traded in the Syro-Lebanese



region is documented by other objects of this type that served the same purpose [21].

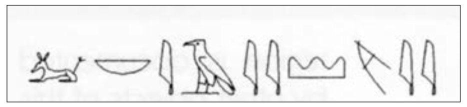
Dating

The first indication of the date of the scaraboid is the archaeological level in which it was found: Middle Bronze II B, which in Egypt represents the end of the XII dynasty and the beginning of the XIII. Moreover, the only known series of apotropaic figurines that contains the toponym 'Iay is now unanimously dated to the very beginning of the XIII dynasty [22]; this coincidence can hardly be fortuitous. The apotropaic figurines from Saqqara, and more particularly number E 21, confirm that it is perhaps at this time, or at a time shortly thereafter, that this Prince of 'Iay should be envisaged as having lived.

Of the cylinder seals from the Syro-Lebanese and Syro-Palestinian regions that bear evidence of writing comparable to that of the Sidon scaraboid,

most by far of those studied in relation to this scaraboid are unanimously dated to the period including Middle Bronze II A and II B (or even, although more infrequently, Middle Bronze II C/III) which corresponds to a dating between 1820 and 1600 BC [23]. This time frame, however, appears too long in view of both the style and the fine workmanship displayed by the Sidonian scaraboid in comparison with the other seals studied in this connection. The style of the hieroglyphs on the Sidonian scaraboid – which are recognizable at a glance, engraved in two columns and nicely enclosed within a narrow gilded border – is developed compared to that of all the other examples studied. The text itself is clearly legible at first sight, which is far from being the case with those on the other Levantine cylinder and scarab seals. These observations would tend to confirm that the lapidary who engraved the text on the Sidonian scaraboid seal – and/or its owner, *Sadok-Re* – were completely conversant with this Egyptian script and used it habitually. The implication is that a knowledge of, familiarity with and more or less habitual use of Egyptian writing on Levantine documents had existed among the Levantines themselves for long enough for it to have become customary (even if they did not completely abandon the manner of their usual Near Eastern writing, whose influence is seen here in the style of the incised hieroglyphs). This also demonstrates that this Egyptian script was not a "*barbarous*" [24] script, since they understood and managed it confidently and intelligently. The Sidon scaraboid is almost too fine aesthetically and too well made not to be a product of the end of Middle Bronze II or very shortly thereafter, and not to have belonged to a "*prince*".

There is, moreover, another detail that has a bearing on the dating and on the attribution of the scaraboid to a notable, such as a "prince" of a city state. It is the phrase:



stẖ/bꜣꜥl nb ỉꜣy mry
beloved of Seth/Ba'al, Lord of lay

The formula "*beloved of this or that god*" is found only in connection with the Egyptian royal titulary. No private individual in Egypt itself ever appropriated this epithet, whose use was strictly confined to the sacred person of the Egyptian sovereign.
There are, in fact, several known instances of such appropriation outside Egypt, particularly a splendid example at Byblos. On the obelisk [25] of the prince of that city, Abi-Shemu declares that he is "b*eloved of Heryshef-Re*" [26]. Moreover, certain Hyksos kings [27] would later keep up the practice, most frequently calling themselves, by the way, "*beloved of Seth*"[28].
The study of the scaraboid thus leads to the consideration of a dating. *Sadok-Re* very probably lived at the very end of the time of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom. The diverse factors noted above, such as the place of origin of the owner (the city-state of 'Iay), archaeological level and context in which the scaraboid was found, the distinctive design of the hieroglyphs (much more elegant than that of the comparable pieces we were able to study) and the epithet "*beloved of Seth/Ba'a*l", provide valuable evidence about the period in which this personage lived.
At this stage of the research, however, it is necesary to be cautious in the dating of the Sidon scaraboid. We thus propose a *terminus a quo* of the very end of Middle Bronze II B and a *terminus ante quem* of the first half of Middle Bronze II C: that is, the pre-Hyksos period [29].
To the best of our knowledge at present, this Sidonian scaraboid that belonged to *Sadok-Re*, a newly found "*prince*" of the city state of 'Iay, has no known parallel.

NOTES

1 It may be remarked that a gash that starts at one of the outer front edges of the object could only have been made with the object of removing the setting that enclosed this seal (with a hard pointed implement such as a burin or something similar).

2 The excavation inventory number is S/3487/583. The scaraboid is 2 cm long, 1.35 cm wide and 0.60 cm high (at its point of greatest thickness).

3 Egyptologists and Semitic scholars have long known that the Egyptian  indicates the Semitic . For examples, *see* G. Posener, 1940, *Princes et pays d'Asie et de Nubie: Textes hiératiques sur des figurines d'envoûtement du Moyen Empire*, Brussels, p. 75 (E 19, p. 82 (E 35) and T. Schneider, 1992, *Asiatische Personennamen in ägyptischen Quellen des Neuen Reiches*, Orbis biblicus et orientalis 114, Freiburg and Göttingen, p. 263, n. 567.

4 The Semitic root "sadiq/sedeq/sadoq" meaning "justice, to be just, just" is well attested among the theophoric anthroponyms of this linguistic area; *see*, for example, Adoni-çédeq, Melki-çédeq, etc. in O. Odelain and R. Séguineau, 2002, *Dictionnaire des noms propres de la Bible*, Paris, p. 325.

5 The author would like to express his gratitude to Professors Pierre Bordreuil and Jean Yoyotte for their knowledgeable and pertinent advice on this subject.

6 G. Posener, 1940, *Princes et Pays d'Asie et de Nubie: Textes hiératiques sur des figurines d'envoûtement du Moyen Empire*, Brussels, p. 76.

7 S. Ahituv, 1984, *Canaanite Toponyms in Ancient Egyptian Documents,* Jerusalem and Leiden, p. 65 [E 21]; R. Hannig, 1995, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen: Grobes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800–950 v. Chr.)*, i, K.A.W. vol. 64, Mainz, p. 1297, situates this toponym in the "Syro-Palestinian" area as above, but cites no refe-rences in support of this proposition; moreover, he transliterates the word as "Ara" (?).

8 On this divinity, in this context, *see* I. Cornelius, 1994, *The Iconography of the Canaanite Gods Reshef and Bacal*, Orbis biblicus et orientalis 140, Freiburg and Göttingen; C. Leitz (ed.), 2002, *Lexicon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, ii, OLA 111, Leuven: Peeters, p. 778.

9 B. Teissier, 1995, *Egyptian Iconography on Syro-Palestinian Cylinder Seals of the Middle Bronze Age* (OBO – Serie Archaeologica No. 11); Freiburg and Göttingen, p. 20, figs. 60, 62, 71, p. 21, figs. 219, 221, 226, p. 30, fig. 62, p. 35, fig. 73. O. Keel, 1995, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel: Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit*, Einleitung OBO – Serie Archaeologica No. 1: Freiburg and Göttingen, p. 32, § 56, figs. 18 and 20 (the two scarabs illustrated are from the sites of Tell Abu Zureq and Megiddo; they are dated to the XII Egyptian dynasty).

10 Stele of Neb.sen, dated to the XI–XII dynasties (stele No. 7586 in the Museo Archeologico di Firenze); S. Bosticco, 1959, *Le Stele Egiziane dall'antico al nuovo regno*, Rome, p. 30, No. 26, fig. 28. Musée du Louvre No. E 10779, of Sep, dated to the XII dynasty; G. Andreu, M.-H. Rutschowscaya and C. Ziegler, 1997, *L'Egypte ancienne au Louvre*, Paris, p. 87–8, No. 32.

11 *See* e.g. Alalakh seal No. 194: D. Collon, 1975, *The Seal Impressions from Tell Atchana/Alalakh*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament, 27, p. 103, fig. 194, pl. XXVII.

12 *See*, for exemple, the stele of Neb.sen (stele No. 7586 in the Museo Archeologico di Firenze), cf. note 10 above; for the influence of the hieratic, *see* G. Möller, 1909, *Hieratische Paläographie: Die Aegyptische Buchschrift in ihrer Entwicklung von der fünften Dynastie bis zur römischen*

Kaiserzeit, i, Leipzig, p. 48, No. 510.

13 P. F. Houlihan, 1988, *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*, Cairo, p. 39–40, No. 20, fig. 55; P. Germont and J. Livet, 2001, *Bestiaire égyptien*, Paris, p. 166; on the Egyptian vulture, *see* B. Letellier, 1977, in B. Letellier and C. Ziegler (eds.), *Le Louvre présente au Muséum de Lyon les Animaux de l'Egypte ancienne*, exh. cat., Lyon, p. 77; J.-M. Lamblard, (ed.), 2001, (with a foreword by Jean Yoyotte), *Le vautour: mythes et réalités*, Paris, p. 129–33.

14 H. W. Fairman, 1943, "Notes on the Alphabetic Signs Employed in the Hieroglyphic Inscriptions of the Temple of Edfu", *ASAE* 43, p. 224, No. 169; A. Gutbub, 1982, "Remarques sur l'épigraphie ptolémaïque: Kom Ombo, spécialement sous Philométor", in *L'Egyptologie en 1979. Axes prioritaires de recherches, II, Colloque de Grenoble du 10 au 15 septembre 1979*, (Actes des Colloques Internationaux du CNRS n° 595), Paris, p. 92, fig. 15, n° 75. S. Cauville, D. Devauchelle and J.-C. Grenier, 1983, *Catalogue de la fonte hiéroglyphique de l'imprimerie de l'I.F.A.O.*, new edn., Cairo, chapter VIII, p. 204–5, especially No. 1161 and No. 337 b on p. 205; F. Daumas † *et al.*, *Valeurs Phonétiques des Signes Hiéroglyphiques d'Epoque Gréco-Romaine*, ii, Montpellier, 1988, p. 292, Nos. 9 (1161) andt 11 (562 n.).

15 B. Teissier, 1995, *Egyptian Iconography on Syro-Palestinian Cylinder Seals of the Middle Bronze Age*, (OBO – Serie Archaeologica n° 11), Freiburg/Göttingen, p. 79, figs. 133–4; p. 69, fig. 97; p. 77, fig. 131; p. 91, fig. 171; p. 94, fig. 174; p. 157, fig. 194; p. 167, figs. 5 p, 133, 134, 153, 195, 208.

17 It even seems as though certain Syro-Lebanese divinities were equipped with horns: B. Teissier, *op. cit.*, p. 77, fig. 126.

16 B. Teissier, 1990, "The Seal Impression Alalakh 194: A New Aspect of Egypto-Levantine Relations in the Middle Kingdom", *Levant,* XXII p. 68–69.

18 B. Teissier, 1995, *Egyptian Iconography on Syro-Palestinian Cylinder Seals of the Middle Bronze Age*, (OBO – Serie Archaeologica No. 11), Fribourg and Göttingen, p. 29–32; D. Collon, 2004, "Seal Workshop", in C. Doumet-Serhal (ed.), *Decade*, Beirut and London, p. 354 (5.1).

19 Although the anthroponym of this man, like those of most of the inscriptions on Egyptian magical figurines from the Near East is not preceded by the Egyptian lexeme "*heka*", G. Posener, 1940, *Princes et pays d'Asie et de Nubie: Textes hiératiques sur des figurines d'envoûtement du Moyen Empire*, Brussels, p. 64 *passim*. One should also note that in the above mentioned passage on the Byblos obelisk the carved lexeme is "*haty-a n*": "Governor of..." and not "*heka*". One may also add that Sadok-Re is the second occurence of the "prince" of the city state of 'Iay and that, like the first "prince" – Aoua-Hadad – posited in Georges Posener's translation, he, too, bears a theophoric name, G. Posener, *ibid.*, p. 76.

20 In this period there was a great growth of cities along the Mediterranean shore of Canaan, F. Smyth, 1998, "Egypte-Canaan: quel commerce?" in *Le Commerce en Egypte ancienne*, cxxi, (Bibliothèque d'Etude de l'IFAO 121), Cairo, p. 9–11. The reader is also referred, for example, to the "Mésaventures d'Oun-Amon" (*Report of Wenamun*), even if this is from a later period than the one in question, in G. Lefèbvre, 1976, *Romans et contes égyptiens de l'Epoque Pharaonique*, Cairo and Paris, p. 204 *et seq.*

21 D. Collon, 1975, *The Seal Impressions from Tell Atchana/Alalakh*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament, 2, p. 103, fig. 194, Pl. XXVII; ead., "Seal Workshop", in C. Doumet-Serhal (ed.), 2004, *Decade*, Beirut and London, p. 348–658, figs. 4–5.

22 G. Posener, 1940, *Princes et pays d'Asie et de Nubie: Textes hiératiques sur des figurines d'envoûtement du Moyen Empire*, Brussels, p. 31–35. Y. Koenig, 1990, "Les Textes d'envoûtement de Mirgissa", *Revue d'Egyptologie,* 41, p. 102.

23 e.g. B. Teissier, 1995, *Egyptian Iconography on Syro-Palestinian Cylinder Seals of the Middle Bronze Age*, (OBO – Serie Archaeologica No. 11), Fribourg and Göttingen, p. 29–32.

24 This term is used here, of course, in the sense in which the Greeks used it.

25 P. Montet, 1962, "Notes et Documents pour servir à l'histoire des relations entre l'Egypte et la Syrie", *Kêmi* xvi, p. 96, fig. 5; J.-F. Salles, 1998, *Liban, l'autre rive*, exh. cat., Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe, p. 68.

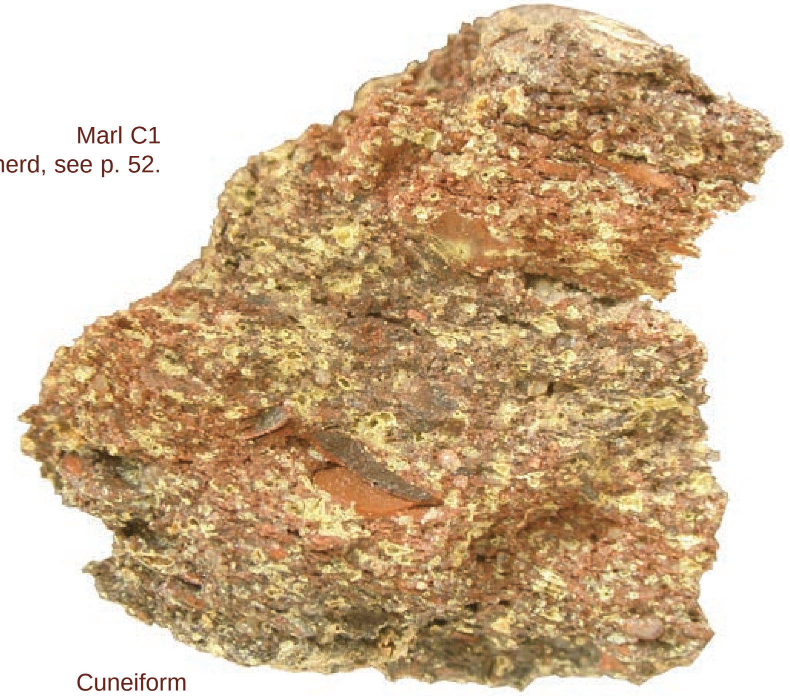
26 It should be remembered that this prince is contemporary with the reign, around 1835–1790 BC, of Amenemhat III in Egypt.

27 H. Gauthier, 1912, *Le Livre des Rois d'Egypte*, ii, Part Three: *Les Rois Hyksôs*, MIFAO 18, Cairo, p. 133–153.

28 To the last reference should be added: M. Abd el-Maksoud and D. Valbelle, 2005, "Tell Héboua-Tjarou. L'apport de l'épigraphie", in *Revue d'Egyptologie,* 56, p.7 –8 (statuette 7), fig. 5 a,b,c, and note 14.

29 In Egyptian history this corresponds to the period between the end of the XXII dynasty, about 1850-1700 BC.

1 Marl C1 sherd, see p. 52.





2 Cuneiform tablet, see p. 116.

3 Duck head, see p. 112.

4 Dolphin jar, see p. 41-43.



5-6 Jar with the name of pharaoh Tawosret, see p. 122-123.





